

## **AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

1. (original) A water-based drilling fluid composition comprising water and a carboxymethyl cellulose (CMC), wherein the CMC is characterized by forming a gel at 25°C after high-shear dissolution in a 0.3 wt% aqueous sodium chloride solution, the final content of the CMC in the aqueous sodium chloride solution being 1 wt% for a CMC having a degree of polymerization (DP) of >4,000, 1.5 wt% for a CMC having a DP of 3,000-4,000, 2 wt% for a CMC having a DP of 1,500-<3,000, and 4 wt% for a CMC having a DP of <1,500, the gel being a fluid having a storage modulus (G') which exceeds the loss modulus (G'') over the entire frequency region of 0.01-10 Hz when measured on an oscillatory rheometer operating at a strain of 0.2.
2. (original) The drilling fluid composition of claim 1, wherein the CMC has a Brookfield viscosity of more than 9,000 mPa.s after high-shear dissolution in a 0.3 wt% aqueous sodium chloride solution, the final content of the CMC in the aqueous sodium chloride solution being 1 wt% for a CMC having a degree of polymerization (DP) of >4,000, 1.5 wt% for a CMC having a DP of >3,000-4,000, 2 wt% for a CMC having a DP of 1,500-3,000, and 4 wt% for a CMC having a DP of <1,500.
3. (currently amended) The drilling fluid composition ~~according to any one of the preceding claims~~ of claim 1 further comprising a smectite type of clay.
4. (currently amended) The drilling fluid composition ~~according to any one of the preceding claims~~ of claim 3 wherein the smectite type of clay is ~~selected from a group consisting of~~ bentonite, a mixed metal layer hydroxide, attapulgite, sepiolite, and or mixtures thereof.
5. (new) The drilling fluid composition of claim 2 further comprising a smectite type of clay.

6. (new) The drilling fluid composition of claim 5 wherein the smectite type of clay is bentonite, a mixed metal layer hydroxide, attapulgite, sepiolite, or mixtures thereof.